

Equalities Commission paid for last court appeal



■ Visitor to Dale Farm
- Trevor Phillips, chairman
of the Equalities and Human
Rights Commission, which
paid for the travellers' last
High Court challenge

By JON AUSTIN
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THE Equalities and Human Rights Commission used taxpayers' cash to pay for the travellers' last High Court challenge.

Families from Dale Farm were not given legal aid for last Wednesday's failed case, because the Legal Services Commission did not believe the case was strong enough.

However, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission paid £2,400 for top housing barrister Andrew Arden to put together grounds for challenge.

On top of that cash, the travellers' solicitors Davies Gore Lomax was able to self-certify legal aid to allow Mary Flynn, 71, to proceed with the case.

David McPherson-Davis, Ramsden Crays parish councillor, said: "It is outrageous taxpayers' money is again used in this never-ending saga."

"A Government agency has effectively sanctioned money towards a case promoting illegal development."

It is understood the Equalities Commission agreed to fund legal advice following an "impartial" visit by boss Trevor Phillips to Dale Farm and the council in July.

A commission spokeswoman said: "The commission will often fund legal advice in cases."

"The director of legal services made the decision. It was felt there was a duty to seek further legal advice on this case and that advice was sent to both sides."

She also denied claims from travellers' barrister Michael Paget during the hearing the commission hoped to intervene in the case on the side of

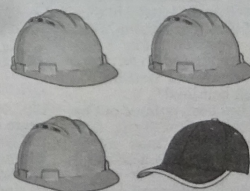
Taxpayers' cash met £2,400 bill for top barrister

the travellers as it did during appeals in 2009.

Council leader Tony Ball said the council did not ask for advice and was only sent it as all evidence from both sides is always disclosed.

He said: "The judge said continued occupation of the site was a criminal act, so the commission effectively funded a legal case in support of this with taxpayers' money."

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Labour leader's eviction support



■ The law has to be upheld - Labour leader Ed Miliband

LABOUR leader Ed Miliband has spoken out in support of the Dale Farm eviction.

In a move that will anger Basildon Labour councillors, who steadfastly oppose the £18million operation, Mr Miliband said: "It has been a long-running and difficult legal argument, but the most important thing now was for the council to exercise its legal

responsibilities. The law has to be upheld across the country whatever people's backgrounds are and wherever they come from."

However, south Essex Labour MEP Richard Howitt continues to campaign on behalf of Dale Farm.

He is calling for the Government to release a confidential report made by the

Council of Europe Human Rights following a fact-finding mission to Dale Farm in March.

Mr Howitt said details in the report could have affected last week's court case or include alternative solutions.

He said: "Anything that could help Basildon Council and the traveller community work towards a negotiated settlement must be tried."

So why aren't the men of Dale Farm in evidence?

WE have seen a cadre of women, children, Vanessa Redgrave, two bishops and several protesters/supporters, but, apart from one male spokesperson, Gratton (uxton, we have seen none of the fathers – the bread winners – on parade in the defence of the Dale Farm travellers.

Why is this? Are they not part of the process?

One of the issues that has been highlighted – a lack of electricity if the travelling folk have to revert back to their vehicles – has not stopped them in the past. Their elderly people existed and coped.

No doubt the offer of council houses, which have been made to those eligible, will be connected to such a supply.

Hospitals will also be in close proximity and we are assured there are plenty of schools to accommodate the children, providing there is a willingness to attend.

The travellers have used an argument for them to stay put on the illegal pitches at Dale Farm the fact that Basildon Council is expected to spend £18m for the eviction.

But how much have the travelling folk used in legal aid through current/ongoing representation which has been based on an aborted premise of settling on green belt land?

It has been pointed out by council leader Tony Ball that the £18m may not be spent if there is a peaceful move.

Surely the moral ground has shifted to the Dale Farm community to pre-

Reader picture

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■ Harvest time – Brent Payne took this picture at Hadleigh

vent the rest of the Basildon community from being forced to use our hard-earned taxes on this case.

MAX AITKINS
Roosevelt Road
Laindon

Shells danger to beach users

ONCE more there are people on Southend's foreshore collecting oysters.

Last year at one point, I counted more than 40 people on one day alone collecting vast sacks of the shellfish.

I did tell Southend

Council's foreshore department about this, and after a few weeks they had disappeared.

At least the whole shell was taken away, but now we have people not only collecting the oysters, but, after taking the meat out, they are leaving the shells on the foreshore.

This is little different from leaving broken glass, as the shells are like razors.

Those using the beach, especially children who like to walk out on the mudflats as the tide comes in, cannot see what lies beneath the shallow water. It is so dangerous.

These people have to be told officially not to do this.

I have spoken to wind-surfers who are worried about the shells cutting through their rubber costumes.

It's about time the council did something about this before there is a serious accident.

M ELLIOTT
Crowstone Avenue
Westcliff

Anger at spy car ticket

HOW dare Southend Council say that "it would defeat the object if the drivers of the camera cars had to get out and check for

blue badges in offending parked cars" (Sept 1).

If the driver had used common sense, swung his camera around a bit more and scanned the dashboard of the vehicle, he would have seen the blue badge and not issued the ticket and done a runner as quick as he/she could.

How dare the council presume everyone is guilty. How dare the council and its employees require that this couple have to send in proof of a blue badge having been placed on the car dashboard at the time, at their own expense and time, after being wrongly ticketed.

Another reason not to trust big brother and the cash-scrounging state.

J RANDALL
Crown Avenue
Basildon

Blooming lovely display

WHAT a lovely display of flowers we have had in Southend's gardens and parks this year.

Despite the many moans we see about Southend Council in the Echo, this is one thing it gets right year after year, together with its rubbish collection service.

LESLEY PITKIN
Western Road
Leigh

POINTS

HERE we go again. The do-gooders of Southend Skipp have decided to get involved in whether or not a Tesco store should be built on the old B&Q site (Sept 1). I just wonder if we looked in the kitchen cupboards or homes of the three committee members, whether would we find products bought from any of the major supermarkets in the town, or do they traipse around the local stores every day supporting the local businesses? I think the answer would probably be no and they go like the rest of us at the weekend or after work and do our shopping at these supermarkets.

PAT CHARREY
Oban Road, Southend

NICK Vince (Sept 1) states that his remembering when beer reached £1 per pint shows his age. It certainly does not show old age, as I remember that in 1939, £1 would buy 60 pints of beer at 4d per pint.

In 1949, £1 would only buy 18 pints at 1s 6d per pint.

In 1950, £1 would buy 40 large cups of coffee in a Lyons Corner House.

Today, I do not patronise public houses or coffee shops, as the shock to my system would be terminal.

W H DIMENT
Church Road, Laindon

FOLLOWING an operation on her broken leg eight weeks ago, my mother-in-law is waiting for physiotherapy. The hospital staff say as my mother-in-law is a resident in a care home, the home staff should provide the treatment. The care home staff say they are not qualified or insured to provide this. We are still waiting for after-care physiotherapy to be provided! Can somebody explain?

NICK VINCE
Rocheway, Rochford

I SPENT four days in Southend Hospital's Eastwood Ward. The staff were very caring and made my stay very comfortable. It is a busy ward, spotlessly clean and the food was good. I cannot praise the hospital enough.

Mrs P DRAPER
Anchor Lane, Canewdon

I USED to work in London Road, West Thurrock, with the late Mel Batty's dad (Aug 31). Every morning we saw Mel running to work at the Board Mills and the lads in the yard always gave him a cheer.

BOB RUST
The Slades, Basildon

We are hiding nothing at County Hall

OPENNESS and honesty are the watchwords of my leadership of Essex County Council and I am a firm believer in informing taxpayers of how the council spends their money.

Therefore I am dismayed at the accusations in the Echo that we at County Hall are trying to hide the facts about Lord Hanningfield's expenses and deliberately not answering questions.

I have made it very plain that on advice from the police and legal represen-

tatives that no one from the administration or senior officers can discuss these matters in detail while the police investigation is underway, as to do so could jeopardise these inquiries.

I am sure every Echo reader would understand this position clearly and how unwise it would be to go against this advice.

I have also explained in public that as soon as I am able to make information public I will.

We are hiding nothing. Just because it doesn't fit

in with an editorial deadline or the chance to score political points from other parties, it is no reason not to allow due legal process to take place.

Please remember it was me, in conjunction with the chief executive, who referred this matter to the police in the first place.

I have also pledged we will publish all itemised credit cards details as soon as we are able to after the investigation, as well as freedom of information responses and relevant

internal audit reports.

As a matter of interest, the Lib Dem leader at County Hall has been kept informed and he has sat on internal audit panels which have discussed this matter.

I have no problem with fair and honest reporting, but misleading articles do little to restore faith in politics or journalism.

PETER MARTIN
Leader, Essex County Council
County Hall, Chelmsford

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